

TWO STUDIES IN THE HORNSEY CHURCH BOOKS

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I. MANOR, PARISH AND VESTRY

At Hornsey, as elsewhere—with reservations for the manors of Topsfield and Brownswood—we find existing side by side, interlocking, interacting, three expressions of a single idea, the ecclesiastical parish, the civil parish, and the manor.

The manor appointed constables, headboroughs and ale-tasters. The officials of the ecclesiastical parish (churchwardens, parish clerk, beadle and sexton) and those of the civil parish (overseers of the poor, surveyors of the highways, and Vestry clerk, besides the master and mistress of the workhouse and the apothecary) were elected at the Vestry meetings, at which the rector was not often present. The Vestry, which represented the old meetings of the township, met at three days' notice, which at Hornsey was given in the parish church and also at "Highgate chapple"; indeed the clerk at Highgate had a guinea a year for his trouble in giving out notices. "We the under Writtin Do Propose and agree that Mr. John Bate-man, Farmer, and Mr. Daniell King, Victuler, be returned as fit and proper Persons to serve ye office of Churchwardens for ye ensuing year" (Vestry minute book, 28th May, 1758).

The churchwardens were answerable only to the Ordinary, that is, to the bishop or his archdeacon. By the Elizabethan statute of 1601 they were linked with the overseers of the poor. In course of time, however, the overseers came to carry out their duties alone. But, whereas the churchwardens were elected by the parish, the overseers, like the surveyors of highways (selected on 26th December), were agreed by the Vestry and then appointed "at the request of this parish" by the justices, who also approved their proposed rate and passed their accounts.

This was legal and proper, but the justices of the 18th century were more than inclined to usurp power that did not belong to them. Thus, at Christmas, 1753, it looks as if the nominations for surveyors were returned to the justices together "with ye Churchwardens and Constables and other officers." Similar attempts had already occurred, for the Calendar of Sessions

Books shows that in April, 1685, an order had been made "for two of the justices to audit the accounts of the churchwardens of Hornsey." This of course was irregular and unjustifiable, for the only lay authority the churchwardens needed to obey was that of their fellow parishioners.

Year by year the court leet elected constables, headboroughs, and ale-tasters. The evidence of the Vestry minutes (and of the Sessions Books) shows that, if slack in their duty or unwilling to serve, these officers were kept up to the mark by the Vestry and that, if for any reason no court was held in any particular year, substitute officials were appointed by the Vestry.

For instance, at the Vestry meeting of 6th June, 1742, it was "Order'd that George Frost and John Willmott present churchwardens of this parish do proceed in the most legal manner to compel Thomas Nock and William Smith to serve the office of Constables for the said parish being elected by the Jury at the Court Leet held 20th April last at the Castle at Highgate in this parish before Francis Dickens Esq steward of this Manner."

In 1644—that troubled year—the magistrates were informed (Westminster, 30th April) that George Savage "was lately chosen by the inhabitants of the parish of Hornsey to the office of constable for this year, for that no leet had lately been held."

Sometimes it happened that the officers chosen at the manor court were for one reason or another not available. Since there would be no court for a year, the Vestry elected substitutes. Thus in 1755 not one of the four constables and headboroughs chosen at the leet of 11th April could serve, and Worley, Doghead, Killett and Mansel were elected at the Vestry meeting of 23rd April. The next manorial court did not meet until 21st April, 1756, and something had to be done.

On 30th May, 1776, James Jacques was "recommended to the magistrates" by the Vestry "to be sworn into the office of constable in the room of William Sims" elected at the court and John Harding into that of headborough. In 1788 again a substitute constable was elected by the Vestry and on 22nd August, 1794, the surveyor of highways was ordered by the Vestry to pay three guineas to Mr. Hunt "for his expences & trouble in serving the office of Headborough last Year in the Room of Mr. Rush." We may perhaps wonder why the surveyor was chosen to pay Mr. Hunt. Presumably the highway purse was temporarily heavier than those containing the church and poor rates.

It is all a matter of convenience. The Vestry appointed substitute officials because at that period the manorial court was meeting but once a year. That court was quite competent to deal with recalcitrant officers, but, if they refused office, it was more convenient for the Vestry to deal with them. For example, on 29th September, 1794, it was "Resolved that in future should any Inhabitant refuse serving any Office he may be appointed to by his Majestys Justices or at the Court Leet That a Vestry shall be forthwith Called to consider what Steps should be taken on such Refusal."

In the matter of providing substitute officers the function of the Vestry is quite clear. What is not so clear is the ownership of certain tracts of common land in the 18th century.

The Hornsey Inclosure Act of 1813 laid down that the Bishop of London, as lord of the manor of Hornsey, was "entitled to the Soil of the Commons and Waste Lands" within the manor, and an examination of the Hornsey Court Rolls shows that at every meeting much of the time of the court was occupied in dealing with the occupation of and encroachment on various parcels of the common.

But towards the end of the 18th century the village began to sell pieces of the waste. A Waste Lands Fund was constituted, the interest of which was usually applied to the relief of the poor. From this we conclude that, side by side with the common land administered by the manorial court, there also existed in Hornsey waste land that was the property of the village.

For example, in July, 1775, Thomas Palmer of Highgate was given leave by the Vestry to take in a plot of land of about 20 feet square to build a summer house "upon the common belonging to this Parish," on payment of a sum to be fixed by the churchwardens. Then in March, 1784, John Brettell and Michael Hodgson were to be allowed to enclose "part of the common on Fortress Green," the proceeds to be used by the surveyor for road-mending and any overplus to be applied to the use of the poor.

Whether the Vestry were not quite sure of their ground or whether the manor pressed a nominal claim to the sovereignty of all land in the parish, at any rate, in March, 1785, the Vestry appointed a committee "to wait on Mr. Dickens the Bishop of London's Steward to know if his Lordship will consent to the Parish selling or Letting there Common etc."

If there was a claim, it must have been a shadowy one, for the manor was tenacious of its rights and later on, in 1793, when the parish sought leave to enclose waste of the manor to enlarge the churchyard, refused permission to do so. The steward cannot have said No to the above-mentioned committee, for in August, 1785, John Porker was allowed to enclose and in September, 1786, a Waste Lands Fund with trustees appointed by the Vestry was formed to receive money paid for enclosed land by John Brettell, Michael Hodgson and William Lester and to invest the proceeds of the sales in "the Publick Funds for the sole use & Benefit of this Parish."

In January, 1787, Baron von Kutzleben, the Hessian envoy, who lived at the Lord's House in the Bushes at the bend in what is now St. James' Lane, John Porker, owner of the Grove after Topham Beauclerk's death in 1780, William Anderson, the Rev. Alexander Grant, and James Wright were given leave to enclose. John Prickett junior was appointed "to measure the said land on behalf of the Parish." In none of these transactions does the manor appear.

Yet it seems that even now the manor made formal grant of parish waste, for on 22nd April, 1794, the Vestry resolved "that Mr. Prickett be directed to measure and value the several Pieces of Waste that may be granted the Ensuing Court Day and return an account of the same to the next Vestry with the Names of the several Proprietors so accommodated with the amount of each Parcel so as to enable the Trustees of the Waste Land Fund to claim the same."

2. THE POOR.

The dissolution of the monasteries in 1539 gave Tudor statesmen a problem as difficult to solve as that of the upkeep of the highways—the care of the poor. The essence of their experience is to be found in the statute of 1601, by which overseers of the poor were created who, with the churchwardens, were to meet once a month to consider methods for relieving the poor and were empowered to make a parish rate, which must be agreed by the justices and could be insisted on, if the latter refused to sign.

The Hornsey poor rate varied between 3d. in the pound in 1740 and 3s. in 1801. Between 1742 and 1751 it was quite often 2d. In 1802 it was down to 2s. again. It did not reach 1s. until 1775, after which it descended from time to time, but the wars with France kept it high.

Nobody liked paying rates, whether church, or poor, or highways, and sometimes protests were made and quarrels occurred. The Poor Fund was augmented by fines paid for refusal to serve parish offices or for burial in linen instead of woollen, by payment for the privilege of burial in the church, and from 1786, when the parish began to sell parcels of waste land, from monies accruing from the Waste Land Fund. Nor must we forget the Hornsey parish charities.

A study of the Hornsey overseers' accounts leaves one with the decided impression that these overworked amateur officials of the 17th and 18th centuries did make a serious attempt to give the poor a square deal. Here are two typical cases of sick persons receiving attention. "Paid for Ann pooley's petition to get her into the hospitall, 1s.; spent upon Doctor Bignall there, 2s. 6d.; Paid for Anne pooley in her weakness, 6s.; paid to goodwife Smith for looking to her, 1s.; paid to Godby for carrying her to ye hospitall, 4s. 6d." (1680).—"Horton in his illness, wines, nurses, etc., 7s. 6d.; sending Horton to St. Thomas' Hospital, 13s. 10d.; Paid for the admission of Haughton to St. Thomas Hospital, 6s." (1774). It is impossible to set out in a limited space a list of the expenses incurred on behalf of the poor, but they are considerable. Rent was paid for the needy, money was given "to keep out of the workhouse," clothes were provided, garments taken out of pawn, coals were granted, pints of wine taken to the sick, and other grants of outdoor relief were considerable.

It is a commonplace to say that the administration of our old law was often milder than its letter. Thus poor persons relieved by the parish must be registered in a parish book and must wear "upon the shoulder of the right sleeve a large letter P and the first letter of the parish." But, whether from slackness or sympathy, this regulation was not at all strictly observed in Hornsey and every now and then the Vestry ordered severely (as in July, 1748) "that overseers do get badges for the poor and oblige them to wear them" or "that the wearing apparel of the Poor of the Parish be of one colour and that they wear a Badge of HP upon their Arms," as in 1782.

I suppose these laws were made to help officials to recognise their own poor, for whose relief they were responsible. This duty they carried out conscientiously, but they lived in terror of entertaining a stranger unawares. The knowledge that pensioners would have to be brought back, with some trouble,

from a neighbouring parish unwilling to maintain them lies behind such a record as: "Ordered that the Master of the Workhouse of this parish keep the Poor therein closely confined for Rambling and wand(er)ing about" (23rd November, 1741).

Every parish saw to it that others played the game and looked after their own poor. If one receiving relief "rambled," he had to be brought back under threat of legal proceedings from his temporary hosts, so on 17th June, 1784, we find the Vestry ordering "that William Owen be fetched back from the Parish of Isleworth, they having served an Order upon this Parish to stand Tryal & this Parish having found that he belongs here since he has been removed."

No doubt excursions of inhabitants of the workhouse were responsible for the following order in the Vestry minutes of 1st July, 1744. "Orderd that the overseers of the Poor do make a proper Fence about the Workhouse with Pails to Inclose it and after the fence so made the Governor of the Workhouse to take care that no Persons have leave to go out of the premises without consent of one of the overseers of the poor or one of the churchwardens."

To such lengths did this resolution to guard the interests of the parish carry the responsible officials that in 1675 Thomas Waters gave a man 5s. "for watching all night to keep out of our parish" a woman about to become a mother.

The Vestry minutes refer on 29th August, 1790, to "the letter of Amity agreed between our Parish and the Parish of Edmonton to prevent vexatious Removals to either Parish." A copy of this letter has been preserved in the Vestry, from which it is further apparent that both sets of officers agree "to assist each other in amity concerning any casual Poor belonging to their respective Parishes."

It was indeed no inconsiderable problem with which local authorities were confronted. For years, indeed centuries, the country was thronged with beggars and vagrants ever in restless motion. When the situation passed all bearing, Parliament would take the matter in hand and order whipping. Then, as in Hornsey, orders would be given for the neglected stocks to be repaired. "Item we present yt there is wanting Stocks and Whipping Posts within the parish of Hornsey aforesd" (Court Rolls, 31st March, 1687). "Order'd That the Church gates and the Stocks be repaired" (Vestry minutes, 10th September, 1792).

It had been the custom for churchwardens to give a small payment with a pass or authorisation to travel to all kinds of "passengers," foreigners, discharged soldiers, and students ("Item given to a poore scoller," 6d.—Buckden Churchwardens' Accounts, Hunts, 1641). In the 18th century this system was adapted to the needs of the times and vagrants and their families were conveyed in a vehicle to their alleged abode with 6d. a day for food. "Paid Mr. David for carrying a Casual to its Parish," 5s. (Hornsey, 1775).

It is informative to glance through the books of Passes in the Vestry. The page for 6th April, 1819, shows such alleged destinations as Greenwich, Ramsgate, Manchester, Chester, Scotland, York, Edinburgh, Liverpool—nearly always some distant objective. Liverpool is a favourite goal and is mentioned 44 times in the first eight pages. Payments recorded on fifty closely written pages total only £30. How wearisome for busy officials the attention to so many petty sums must have been!

In 1743 Henry Rumball, governor of the workhouse, which stood in the Priory Road, was paid 2s. a week, in 1754 Alan Rogers had 2s. 6d. weekly "with the use of the parish house and all therein." When he died in 1757, his widow was appointed "to maintain and cloath ye poor." We learn that Mr. and Mrs. Mathews were master and mistress in 1782 at £12 and £8 a month respectively. When William Hood and his wife were appointed in 1784, the £12 became 12 guineas. In 1782 Mr. William Brock served as apothecary for 6 guineas a year. In 1787 Mr. Thomas Sandys received 12 guineas as apothecary and man-midwife, and in 1792 £14.

The overseers were not left to wrestle alone with their difficult problems. It was agreed in 1756 "that any Parishioner paying to Church and poor shall have ye libirty to Inspect ye Worke House and make complaint to ye parish officers." We hear for the first time of a committee which met at the workhouse every Wednesday at five o'clock and (in 1784) consisted of the churchwardens, the overseers and four others.

On the evidence at my disposal I am not prepared to give an opinion on the way in which the Hornsey Workhouse was run in the days before the amendment of the Poor Laws. It was a mixed workhouse, that is, an all-purposes institution. On 25th March, 1823, it held 20 men, 30 women, and 10 boys and girls, giving a total of 60, which was the average number of its

inmates taken through the year. When poor people from the workhouse were employed in 1789, the rates were: 6d. a day for a man, 4d. for a woman, and 3d. for a boy or girl.

Now such entries in the overseers' accounts as "Paid for bringing a Madman to the Workhouse and setting up all night, 4s." (1775) give some idea of the horrors endured by the inmates (children included) of a mixed workhouse. On the other hand, there is preserved in the Vestry a scrap of paper with the words, addressed to a local publican: "Please to send for the use of the people resident in the workhouse 32 Pots of Beer—New Years Day next.—Hornsey Workhouse. Dec. 25. 1816." Surely there is benevolent intention here. It is hard to ignore 32 pots of beer.

On the whole, I suppose the workhouse to have been managed in an unimaginative way. Lack of insight is fruitful of many of our ills.

"The placing forth poor children apprentices is esteemed one of the best methods of providing for the poor." So ran the statute of the 43rd year of Elizabeth, and a law of James I empowered overseers to raise money for placing apprentices, as for relief of the poor, by taxing the parish. The overseers might, with the help of the justices, oblige certain classes of people to take apprentices, whether with money or without.

Three Hornsey charities, the Gifts of Roger Draper (1659), Ann Smith (1662), and Daniel Midwinter (1750) provided money for putting out poor children apprentices. The gifts are fully detailed in Lloyd's *Highgate* and there is no need to describe them here.

The system of poor relief I have outlined continued for more than two centuries. But, when the French wars came to an end, it was clear that an effort must be made to organise afresh, for the cost, which had been two millions for the whole country in 1784, had risen to eight millions in 1818 and yet neither humanitarians nor wage-earners were or could be satisfied with the result. At length the inquiry instituted in 1832 led to the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834, a measure which, received with universal applause, brought little but disappointment in its train, but marks a most important stage in the progress of our institutions, since for the first time an attempt was made to impose a single plan on the local government of the country and to control it nationally.